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ABSTRACT

It is proposed that the most effective technique for teaching about aging and the aged at the secondary level is through the use of intergenerational activities, providing opportunities for the interaction of young and old. Including older adults in various class activities is suggested. Using these individuals as guest instructors and aides in the classroom is offered as one way to provide intermingling of the generations. Sport activities, health education, and social studies are pointed out as areas of interest to both young and old. (JD)

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INTERGENERATIONAL ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING ABOUT AGING AND THE AGED IN HEALTH, PHYSICAL EDUCATION AND SOCIAL STUDIES

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FOREWARD

Each day, more educators recognize the value of teaching about aging and the aged in the public school. Studies, such as that by Richard Jantz and Carol Seefeldt (1977) at the University of Maryland, are providing a body of evidence to indicate that children as early as kindergarten and first grade begin to exhibit negative attitudes toward aging and the aged. As teachers at all grade levels, across the United States, begin to realize the need for teachers to actively combat the mythology of aging which pervades our society, they also begin to seek approaches and materials for teaching about aging. For this purpose, the Clearinghouse for Public School Aging Education was established at Tennessee Technological University, in conjunction with the Tennessee Commission on Aging in September of 1979. In the winter of that year, a small group of graduate and undergraduate students at Tennessee Tech worked diligently, as part of a course on teaching about aging and the aged, to assemble the following intergenerational activities for teaching about aging and the aged. Keyed to their own subject areas (health and physical education and the social studies), many of these activities are adaptable for other content areas. All should be effective in the hands of a motivated teacher who seeks to combat the stereotype and myths concerning the old which abound in American society.

John W. Myers, Ph.D.
Director
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School Aging Education

After carefully reviewing all applicable curricular materials and descriptions of curricular programs in the files of the Clearinghouse for Public School Aging Education, we have concluded that the single most effective technique for teaching about aging and the aged at the secondary level is through the use of intergenerational activities: providing opportunities for the interaction of young and old. In terms of breaking down stereotypes held by each group concerning the other, no technique works as quickly or achieves the types of long lasting effects that produce changes in attitudes and behaviors. We highly recommend the following activities for use in health, physical education and social studies classrooms.

HEALTH: In addition to the following intergenerational activities, the health teacher can fight the battle against agism by teaching his students lifelong health skills, devoting at least one period to the discussion of stereotypes, utilizing such provoking films as "Peege" and "The Shopping Bag Lady" (check with your state Commission on Aging for possible free loans), and using roleplaying and simulations to help students learn about being old in America.

1. Classroom aides: Bring a dynamic elder into the classroom as a clerical aide for grading tests, or as a tutor. In many programs, elder volunteers have displayed a degree of dedication, patience and reliability unequaled by any other age group. Many students will adjust their attitudes simply on the basis of exposure to a good model. The

elder also may find out that the young are not so bad as anticipated. Intergenerational activities are a two-way street.

2. Guest instructors: Bring a retired health professional into your classroom as a guest speaker. Years of experience in the health field can yield a wealth of knowledge for an enterprising health teacher.

3. Field trips: Take your students to visit an active senior center and let them meet some active elders. Or, with preparation, take them to visit a nursing home or other health care center for the elderly. Be sure to stress in such visits that less than five percent of the over sixty-five population in this country require some type of institutionalization.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION: In addition to the following, the physical education teacher can teach his students lifelong skills (swimming, golf, softball, shuffleboard, archery, bocci-ball, jogging, tennis, horseshoes, etc.) which can be pursued at any age.

1. Classroom aides: The physical education teacher or coach can utilize the aid of a dynamic elder as well as any other teacher. A dynamic elder, who has played golf all his life, can prove an excellent demonstrator or tutor for students deficient in basic sports skills.

2. Guest instructors: Bring an experienced former golf pro or local tennis champion in to teach a few skills. Every community boasts older sports buffs who can play rings around many younger players; check your local tennis clubs, golf pro shops, and so forth. Being beaten in [illegible] by a seventy year old gentleman can do wonders in adjusting the attitudes of high school tennis players.

3. Field trips: Match up an elder with a student for a trip to a baseball game, golf tournament, or other sports feature. Such trips provide an excellent opportunity for interaction between young and old.

4. Free admission to school sports events: Providing such an invitation to citizens sixty-five or over may help in improving community support for school teams. Such a gesture also indicates recognition by the school of the existence of the elderly as a group. Former alumni may very well attend every game. In some schools, it may be advisable to set aside a portion of seating just for older citizens.

5. Hold your own sports event: In cooperation with the student council, sponsor an intergenerational event. Contact community service organizations (Lions, Rotary, etc.) for help in organizing and funding. Consider holding a square dance, a "Senior-Olympics," a "Walk-a-thon," a "Dance-a-thon," or other similar event. In terms of school-community relations, the returns could be superb. You might even insure a few extra votes the next time a bond issue needs to be passed. Elders have perhaps the best voting record of any group.

SOCIAL STUDIES: In addition to the following, the social studies teacher has one of the best opportunities to teach formally about aging and the aged. Such subjects as retirement, institutionalization, the role of the aged in society, the history of aging in America, the development of stereotypes, and the study of the aged as a population sub-group belong somewhere in the social studies curriculum. They are highly relevant issues which will affect each student in various ways; aging is something we all have in common.

1. Classroom aides: For clerical tasks or tutoring, the older volunteer can prove invaluable.

2. Guest instructors: One of the phenomena which commonly occurs as part of the normal aging process is the improvement of long term memory. The implications for teachers of history are obvious: in every community are those resources who can give a personal slant to what it was like to live through the Depression, to fight in the Argonne or at Normandy. Historically, the old have always been the storytellers in society; why not utilize this resource?

3. Oral history: Arm your students with a list of pertinent questions to ask about a specific era or historical event and send them into the community to gather data from elders who experienced it. Put the data together in class to get a personalized picture of the time or event. The first person stories should prove fascinating and students will benefit from interacting with an elder.

4. Community survey: Arm your student with a demographic survey, send them out to interview elders, and put the data together to get a demographic profile of the aged in your community or neighborhood.

5. "Foxfire" type collections: Send students out to discover a disappearing skill (tatting, wood carving, etc.). They can interview skilled elders, record the skills, and perhaps produce a "Foxfire" type publication unique to your geographic area. Perhaps an elder would be willing to come to school to demonstrate a disappearing art for the class.

6. Field trips: A trip to a senior center or nursing home, in conjunction with a classroom unit of study can be highly effective.

SELECTED READINGS

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4. Fischer, David. Growing Old in America. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977.

5. Kasch, F. W., & Boyer, J. L. Adult Fitness, Principles and Practices. New York: Lippincott, 1971.

6. Taylor, R. B. Feeling Alive After 65. New Rochells, NY: Arlington House, 1973.

7. Weitzman, David. My Backyard History Book. Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1975.

8. Wigginton, Elliot (ed.). The Foxfire books. New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1972-1977.

9. Winter, R. Ageless Aging. New York: Crown Publishers, 1973.

SELECTED MEDIA

1. "Peege" 28 minutes/color Phoenix Films, INc. 470 Park Avenue South, New York, 10016. Purchase: $395.00 Rental: $40.00. An effective film detailing a Christmas visit to Grandma in a nursing home, as seen through the eyes of different family members. Focuses on problems of effective communication between Peege and her visitors.

2. "Our Changing Family Life" 22 minutes/B & W. Audio-Visual Center, Division of Extension and University Services, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, 52240. Rental: $4.00. Looks at changes in American economic and social life since 1880.

3. "To Hell With Grandma" Write for information to : Audio-Visual Narrative Arts, Box 9, Pleasantville, NY.

4. "Millie" 30 minutes/color. Write for information to: Lutheran Television, Box 14572, St. Louis, MO 63178. Rental only.

5. "Our Elders: A Generation" (filmstrip). Prentice-Hall Media, Serv Code HB 26, 150 White Plains Road, Tarrytown, NJ 10591. $45.00.

6. "How Would You Like to be Old?" Guidana Associates, 757 Third Avenue, New York, NY. Two filmstrips with discussion guide and records: $41.50; if cassette tapes desired in lieu of records: $46.50.